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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 5698  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 008455

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL PTER ELAB ECON VE CO

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S NOVEMBER 28 MEETING WITH GOVERNOR ANGELINO GARZON

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield

Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶11. (C) Governor Angelino Garzon told the Ambassador the GOC's suspension of Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba's and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' efforts to promote a humanitarian accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) stemmed from their mercurial approaches, the GOC's failure to set clear rules of the game, and the FARC's intransigence. In the future, the GOC should rely on Colombians from the private sector rather than international facilitators. Garzon claimed that the opposition Polo Democratico Alternativo (PDA) needs to move to the political center, but noted that such a strategy faces strong resistance from radical groups within the party. He said the GOC and USG need to show the social and economic benefits of a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), and criticized Colombian union leaders for opposing the FTA on ideological grounds rather than using it to seek concrete benefits for their members. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) The Ambassador met on November 28 with former labor leader and outgoing Valle de Cauca Governor Angelino Garzon. The GOC had previously authorized Garzon to act as a facilitator to promote a humanitarian accord with the FARC. Garzon served as Labor Minister in President Pastrana's administration.

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CHAVEZ/CORDOBA FACILITATION EFFORT DESTINED TO FAIL  
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¶13. (C) Garzon said the efforts of Chavez and Cordoba to promote a humanitarian exchange with the FARC were destined to fail. The radical Cordoba maintained ties too closely with the erratic and uncontrollable Chavez. Garzon said he had cautioned Cordoba to act with &prudence and discretion,<sup>8</sup> and to keep President Uribe informed of each step in the process. A humanitarian exchange could take place without Chavez, but not without Uribe. Garzon said Cordoba ignored his advice, keeping Uribe in the dark about her activities and &acting as if she were a Venezuelan Senator instead of a Colombian Senator.<sup>8</sup> She had ended up appearing as a &militant Chavista political supporter<sup>8</sup> rather than an objective facilitator.

¶14. (C) Garzon said the GOC's failure to set clear rules of

the game for Chavez and his interaction with the FARC further complicated the process. Uribe and GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo had not privately discussed the terms of the facilitation effort with Chavez before accepting his involvement, nor had they considered the consequences of failure. Any process with the FARC needs clear rules, since the group always maintains a "double discourse," lacks any sense of time constraints, and disdains both domestic and international public opinion. Garzon observed that the FARC's continued use of kidnapping, narcotrafficking, and extortion—all of which alienated most Colombians\* to finance its operations reflects its lack of concern for public opinion.

¶ 15. (C) Garzon said the GOC should use Colombian rather than international facilitators in future efforts to promote a humanitarian exchange. These individuals should take a pragmatic approach, come from the private sector, enjoy the GOC's confidence, and not affiliate with a particular party. They should incorporate input from civil society and the international community, but should not depend on these groups. He argued that any facilitation effort should also involve a "political pact" among the GOC, governing coalition parties, and the opposition Liberal and Polo Democratic parties on the basic elements of security policy and a peace process.

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COLOMBIAN MILITARY PUNCTURING & MYTH OF FARC'S INVINCIBILITY<sup>8</sup>

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¶ 16. (C) Garzon observed that humanitarian accord talks have resulted in "bad business" for the FARC, reinforcing its reputation for savagery among the Colombian populace. The group's radical stance on kidnapping has provided the group with some funding, but not advanced its broader political, economic or military interests. He said recent Colombian military successes have begun to break the "myth of the FARC's invincibility," leading some Colombians to believe that the military could defeat them. This further eroded the group's bargaining power, and clouded prospects for a humanitarian accord.

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POLO DEMOCRATICO

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¶ 17. (C) Garzon opined that PDA leaders must decide if they want to play a permanent opposition role or if they want to create a viable alternative to govern. He speculated that if the PDA expects to have a realistic chance to win the 2010 presidential elections, it must adopt elements of successful Uribe policies on security, economic growth, and public communication while differentiating itself on social issues. An anti-Uribe campaign will not win in 2010. Garzon added that the party's failure to take a pragmatic approach had prevented it from expanding its political base in the October local elections. With the exception of Bogota and Narino, the PDA had failed to achieve its goals in terms of mayoral posts, municipal councilman, and departmental deputies. Garzon noted with relish that he had helped defeat the radical Polo candidates for mayor in Cali.

¶ 18. (C) Garzon commented that PDA Senator Gustavo Petro--despite his opposition to the FTA with the United States--is trying to move the party to the political center. Still, Petro faces strong resistance within the party from radical elements associated with the Communist Party and the Independent Revolutionary Workers Movement. He predicted that these radical groups--supported by Bogota mayor-elect Samuel Moreno--will support another presidential bid by Polo President Carlos Gaviria in 2010.

¶9. (C) Garzon said he supports the bilateral FTA, noting that murders of unionists and crimes against union organizers have fallen sharply. The GOC has shown openness to meeting with union leaders and addressing their concerns. He criticized Colombian union leaders for failing to exploit U.S. interest in the FTA to achieve concrete social and organizing benefits for their members. Instead, union leaders have simply opposed the FTA on ideological and political grounds. Garzon contended that to facilitate popular acceptance of the FTA, Colombian unions should press for specific improvements such as creation of a social fund, extension of reciprocal social security benefits, and establishment of a better legal framework for union organization. The GOC and the USG also need to show the FTA's social and economic benefits, he concluded.

Brownfield